ROGUES, RASCALS, & VILLAINS

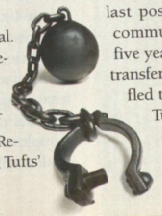
Presenting a dirty dozen of Maine's most loathsome — from itinerant ax murderers to homegrown Nazis.

BY EDGAR ALLEN BEEM

A fair number of nefarious characters have passed through Maine on their way to infamy. The pirate Dixie Bull stopped by to sack Pemaquid in 1632. His more illustrious colleague Edward Teach, aka Blackbeard, allegedly honeymooned on the Isles of Shoals in 1720. Gangster Al Brady, the FBI's Most Wanted criminal at one time, was gunned down by G-men in the streets of Bangor in 1937. And then, most recently and horrifically, there were the 9/11 terrorists who took off from the Portland International Jetport in 2001.

The rogues and scoundrels assembled here, however, are either Maine natives we'd like to disown or notorious individuals remembered largely for mischief, misdeeds, or mayhem perpetrated right here in the Pine Tree State.

HENRY TUFTS (1748-1831)



He may well have been Maine's first career criminal. Though a native of New Hampshire, in 1807 the larcenous Mr. Tufts detailed his life of crime in *A Narrative of the Life, Adventures, Travels, and Sufferings of Henry Tufts, Now Residing at Lemingion [sic], in the District of Maine, in Substance as Compiled from His Own Mouth*. Republished in 1930 as *The Autobiography of a Criminal*, Tufts' recollections, written in highfalutin', pseudo-intellectual prose, describe a picaresque one-man crime wave that swept across New England in the late 1700s.

In those wild colonial days, Tufts galloped across New Hampshire, Massachusetts, and the District of Maine (as yet still part of the Bay State) stealing horses, dogs, livestock, and the hearts of ladies (several of whom he married bigamously), dressing himself off the clotheslines of others, breaking into cobblers' shops when in need of new shoes, and in general living a vagabond life of pilfering and theft, often finding it "requisite to levy contributions on the public."

Tufts also confessed to passing counterfeit money and to being a serial deserter during the Revolutionary War, although he did make himself useful while in uniform by stealing supplies for his unit. Oddly enough, it was possession of a stolen silver tablespoon and five silver teaspoons in Marblehead, Massachusetts, that got Tufts sentenced to hang in 1794. At the last possible minute, however, Governor Samuel Adams commuted Tufts' sentence to life imprisonment. He served five years in Castle Williams in Boston Harbor before being transferred to the Salem jail, where he promptly escaped and fled to Limington. There, if he can be believed, a reformed Tufts lived out a blameless old age, "never taking clandestinely from man, woman, or child to the value of a single pin."

MAINE'S WORST
(1) The son of Down East columnist "Doc" Rockwell, George Lincoln Rockwell headed the American Nazi Party. (2) Rockwell was gunned down by one of his own vile followers. (3) Most Mainers don't know that Axis Sally was born in Portland. (4) Major General James Henry Carleton sent scores of Navajos to their deaths. (5) Sadly, the Ku Klux Klan flourished in Maine under the leadership of Eugene Farnsworth.

OPPOSITE PAGE: ASSOCIATED PRESS 1-3; MAINE STATE ARCHIVES 4; COLLECTIONS OF MAINE HISTORICAL SOCIETY 5; IMAGE MONKEY 6065

Just prior to his imprisonment, Henry Tufts had studied herbalism in Bethel with the legendary Indian medicine woman Molly Ockett, whom he had sought out to treat a severe knife wound. Thus, "Doctor" Tufts was able to make a meager living in retirement from crime as a healer, about as close to legitimacy as he ever got.

DANIEL BRACKETT (1757-1826)

Brackett was the leader of a band of so-called White Indians in Fairfax (now Albion) in the years just prior to Maine statehood. Whether one views him as a colonial terrorist or populist patriot depends somewhat on one's political point of view. For his part, Daniel Brackett regarded the great proprietors and landowners of the Kennebec region as the real "rogues and deceivers," as he called them in an 1808 White Indian recruiting notice.

The resentment that native Mainers sometimes feel to this day toward folks "from away" has historical roots in the White Indian movement that swept rural Maine in 1807. Revolutionary War veterans like Brackett, who came from Falmouth (now Portland) in 1798 to settle a hundred-acre parcel in Fairfax, deeply resented paying taxes and tributes to the great proprietors, baronial landowners who had been deeded vast tracts of Maine by English kings. Had they not, after all, just fought and won a war of independence from England?

As Thomas Jefferson's 1807 embargo on foreign trade precipitated an economic depression, and the Kennebec proprietors commenced legal proceedings to force payment or removal of settlers, guerrilla bands of White Indians such as Brackett's began dressing as Native American warriors and attacking surveyors and sheriffs' deputies out to serve quit claim papers on them.

"To shock," writes historian Alan Taylor in his wonderful 1990 *Liberty Men and Great Proprietors*, "some White Indians killed, roasted, and ate the horses of persistent deputies before their eyes."

In April, 1808, when Brackett was arrested for debt, his White Indian comrades liberated him by shooting the horse of Fairfax Constable Moses Robinson and taking the lawman to Brackett's cabin where they stripped him, beat him soundly with sticks, and sent him off naked into the woods.

Ultimately, Brackett was forced to flee Maine for upstate New York, where he made his way as an itinerant shoemaker until his death in 1826.

DORCAS DOYEN, AKA HELEN JEWETT (1813-1836)

The most beautiful and high-class call girl of her day in Portland and Boston and New York until her untimely death in 1836, Doyen was born in Hallowell, the daughter of Welsh immigrant parents. She worked as a servant in the Augusta home of Judge Nathan Weston from age thirteen to seventeen, during which time she acquired an education, a love of literature, and mastery of several languages.

One of her clients murdered the 23 year old hooker in her bed, hitting her in the head with an ax and setting her body afire.

At seventeen, however, young Doyen seems to have had a rather disastrous love affair that ultimately led the fallen woman to a life of prostitution, first in Portland, thereafter at Mrs. Bryant's whorehouse in Boston and Mrs. Berry's house of ill repute in New York. Doing business under the pseudonyms Helen (Ellen or Nell) Jewett, Maria Benson, Ellen Spaulding, Helen Mar, and Maria Stanley, the Maine beauty was a star attraction of the Manhattan demimonde, carrying on lengthy correspondences with her friends, lovers, and clients, attending the theater, traveling, and dressing elegantly.

Jewett's life in the fast lane came to an abrupt and tragic halt, however, on the night of April 9, 1836, when one of her clients murdered the twenty-three-year-old hooker in her bed, hitting her in the head with an ax and setting her body afire. The lurid details of Miss Jewett's life and death provided fodder for New York tabloids for months, until the acquittal of the man charged with her murder. In the wake of the Jewett murder, New York began a serious effort to clean up prostitution in the city. Portland, Maine, might well have done the same.

AUGUSTUS KING (dates unknown)

King was the proprietor of a Portland dance hall and house of prostitution popular with sailors up from the waterfront. When, in 1849, his establishment came under sustained attack by a mob of seamen armed with a swivel cannon, Mr. King fought back gallantly and, as a newspaper of the day put it, King "in a better cause would be quite a hero." As it is, King is remembered, if at all, as the protagonist of Portland's King Riot, sometimes known as the Whorehouse Riot of 1849.

The King Riot was a colorful episode in Portland history that sounds in retrospect like a scene out of the motion picture *Gangs of New York*. Augustus King, who was fairly new to the city, was a black man who lived with his white wife and one child in an establishment on the side of Munjoy Hill in a neighborhood extirpated long ago to provide sand and gravel to build Commercial Street. While advertised as a dance hall, King's business and the seedy hotel next door were known to attract ladies of the evening and their rowdy, seafaring clientele.

The cause of the riot remains a mystery, but the precipitating

events seem to have occurred on the evening of July 4, 1849, when a group of sailors created a disturbance at King's dance hall and the owner saw fit to drive them away with gunfire. Three weeks later the sailors returned with a small brass cannon and fired five cannon balls into King's house, one ball passing through the headboard where King and his wife and child slept. Again, Augustus King returned fire.

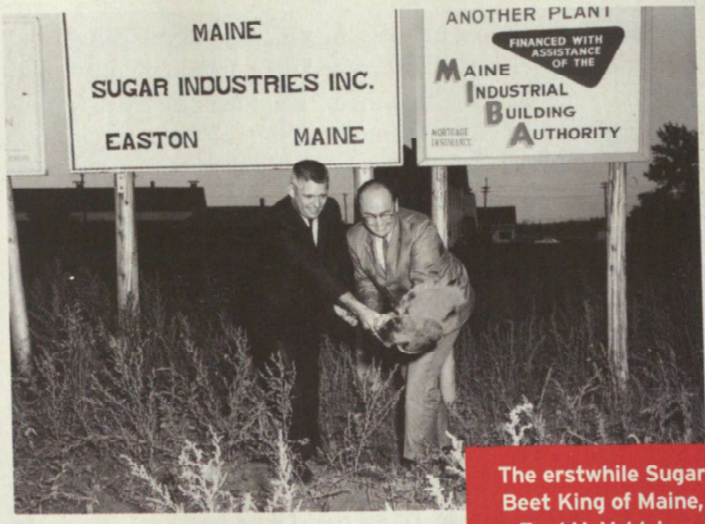
Then, a month and half later, on September 7, 1849, roving bands of seamen made their way to King's dance hall and laid siege to it until King drove them away with gunfire. Later that evening, as word of the violence spread and a crowd gathered, the sailors returned with a cannon and began firing on his house. King fired back, wounding fourteen and killing one.

The following day, with King in jail, a mob returned to burn his dance hall down, keeping both Portland police and firemen at bay until the Portland Light Infantry was called out to quell the riot. King left town not long after getting out of jail and was never heard from again.

HENRY PLUMMER (1832-1864)

Plummer is perhaps the most paradoxical of Maine villains — a lawman gone bad and a Wild West outlaw from Down East Maine. Born in Addison, the seventh child of a local sea captain, Henry Plummer never felt the call of the sea. Instead, in 1852, at the age of nineteen, he heeded the call of gold and sailed for California.

A year after arriving in California, Plummer owned a ranch and mine outside Nevada City. He traded the mine for a bakery and, when that failed, he decided to run for sheriff. In his second



MAINE STATE ARCHIVES

The erstwhile Sugar Beet King of Maine, Fred H. Vahlsing (at right) was a world-class polluter and shady dealer.

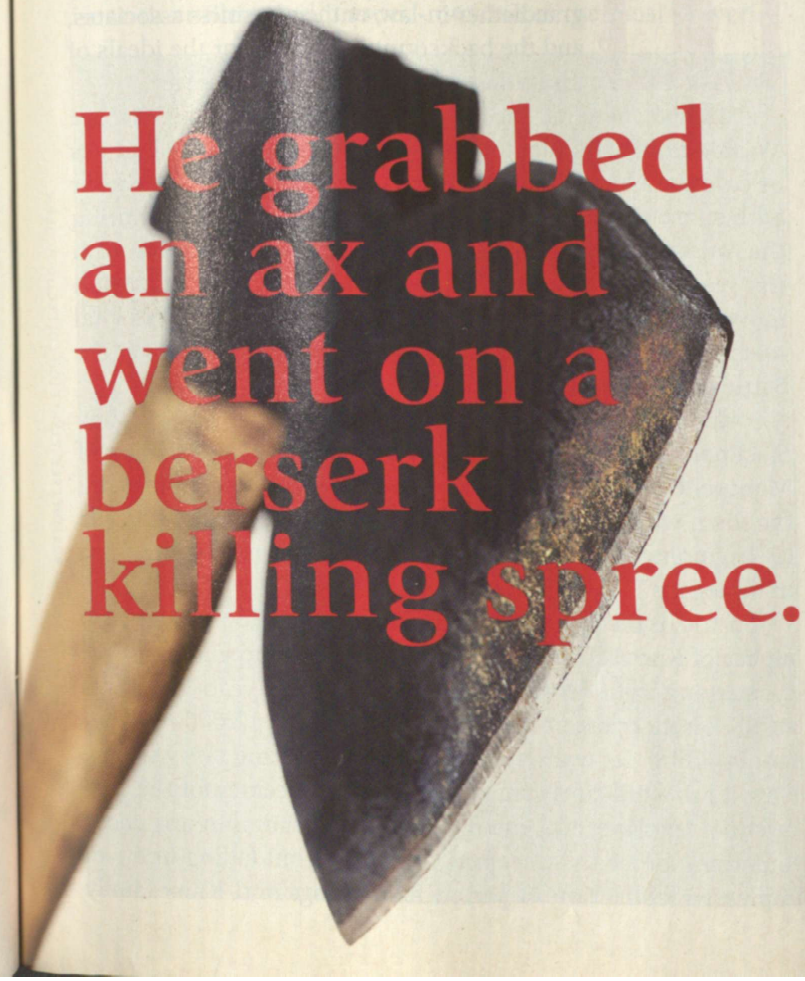
term as sheriff, however, Plummer crossed the line from lawman to criminal, gunning down the irate husband of a woman with whom he was having an affair. Sentenced to ten years in prison, he served only six months before being released. Thereafter, Plummer turned to a dissolute life of brothels and crime.

Again smelling the riches of gold, Plummer moved to the Montana Territory where he not only managed to get himself elected sheriff of Bannack, but secretly became the leader of a large gang of road agents that preyed on gold shipments. By some accounts, Plummer and his gang killed as many as 120 miners, stealing their gold and dismembering their bodies.

Plummer's murderous ways came to an end, however, when a vigilante posse, tipped off that Plummer was actually the leader of the outlaw gang, came for the sheriff on the frigid evening of January 10, 1864.

"Give me two hours and a horse," Plummer reportedly pleaded with the lynch mob, "and I'll bring back my weight in gold."

His plea fell on deaf ears. The vigilantes strung him up on a gallows Plummer had himself built. People have been searching for Henry Plummer's gold ever since.



He grabbed an ax and went on a berserk killing spree.

MAJOR GENERAL JAMES HENRY CARLETON (1814-1873)

The general was once the most hated man in New Mexico by virtue of the ruthless way he crushed the Navajo nation while serving as the military commander of the territory. The charitable view of General Carleton might be that he was an "Indian fighter," but as *The Native Americans: An Illustrated History* notes, "Carleton was unpopular even among his own men, and in trouble throughout the Civil War. A stickler for protocol, extreme in his views, he was almost a caricature of the tyrannical military martinet."

Born in Lubec, Carleton was commissioned a lieutenant in the Maine Militia in 1838 and served during the border dispute with British Canada known as the Aroostook War. As an officer in the Regular Army, he served in California and New Mexico, where he took it upon himself to put down Indian uprisings by

any means necessary. In 1863, he sent his troops against the Mescalero Apaches with orders to kill all Indian men "whenever and wherever you find them" and then ordered Colonel Christopher "Kit" Carson to destroy all the crops in Navajo territory to starve them into submission.

Both Carson and the Indian Bureau objected to Carleton's scorched earth policy, but Carleton prevailed, subduing eight thousand Navajo and sending them on the infamous "Long Walk" to Bosque Redondo, where many died of starvation and disease.

Today, whether General Carleton is portrayed as a war hero or a war criminal depends entirely upon who is writing his history.

LOUIS WAGNER (c.1846-1875)

Wagner was the ax murderer of Smuttynose Island. Equally heinous crimes had occurred in Maine before and have since, but, perhaps for reasons of setting and circumstance, the double murders at Smuttynose continue to haunt Maine's history and imagination like no other.

Louis Wagner, a dark, brooding German fisherman with a thick accent, arrived on the Isles of Shoals around 1871. There he boarded on and off with the Hontvedts, a family of Norwegian fishermen. On the cold, moonlit night of March 6, 1873, Wagner repaid his hosts' kindness with blood.

Desperate, destitute, and possibly deranged, Wagner had been working on the Portsmouth waterfront for some time when he decided to steal a dory and row the twelve miles across to Smuttynose, apparently intent on burglarizing the Hontvedt cottage. He knew that John Hontvedt and Evan Christensen, Hontvedt's brother-in-law, were ashore, but when he discovered that John's wife, Maren, her sister Karen Christensen, and their sister-in-law Anethe Christensen were at home he grabbed an ax and went on a berserk killing spree. Karen and Anethe were butchered and bludgeoned to death and Maren, herself wounded in the attack, was driven out in the winter's night in her bedclothes. She hid in a cave by the shore all night before walking barefoot across the stone breakwater to nearby Malaga in the morning.

> To shock, some White Indians killed, roasted, and ate the horses of persistent deputies before their eyes.

From the time he was apprehended until the day he died, Wagner protested his innocence, but there was never any doubt in the public's mind that CONTINUED ON PAGE 115

HENRY KNOX: HERO OR SCOUNDREL?

The truth about Maine's "founding father" is that he might have been both.

BY COLIN WOODARD

Henry Knox has been dead for more than two centuries, but he still casts a long, broad shadow over midcoast Maine, a region where the counties and older towns are named for him, his grandfather-in-law, or their business associates, and the backcountry hamlets for the ideals of the settlers who rose up against his rule.

Military hero of the Revolution, confidante to George Washington, and inheritor of one of the greatest landed estates of colonial New England, Knox is the only Founding Father with substantial ties to Maine. His truly heroic exploits during the American Revolution have received renewed attention with the release of David McCullough's *1776* and the television movie adaptation of *John Adams*, which celebrate Knox's vital role in breaking the siege of Boston and the British lines at the Battle of Yorktown.

"Knox is finally gaining some traction," says Renny Stackpole, of Thomaston, longtime director and board chair of Montpelier, the General Henry Knox Museum in Thomaston, the town where Knox spent the last decade of his life. "People are beginning to recognize his name and so are getting interested in his legacy."

So, too, is the museum that bears his name. Housed in a 1930 replica of Knox's Thomaston mansion, the Montpelier museum is emerging from decades of privation. Twenty years ago it was an all-volunteer organization unable to heat its 12,0000-square-foot building. Its walls were literally mouldering every spring. Now it has a full-time staff of four, a nascent center for the education of teachers, and enough money to begin thinking about something other than keeping the roofs from falling in on an impressive collection of period furnishings and Knox family

possessions. "We're just getting our feet under ourselves, and we're seeing enormous growth in many directions," says Ellen Dyer, the museum's director of education, who hopes it will one day be a peer of Mount Vernon and Monticello, the house museums of Washington and Thomas Jefferson. "We want to be an institution that people will look to for answers."

But doing that requires fielding some unpleasant questions about Knox's later life, when many in New England regarded the portly general not as a hero of the Revolution but as one of the villains who sought to subvert its democratic promise. Nowhere was Knox as controversial as in Maine, where he tried to build a baronial fortune through corruption, cronyism, and the monopolistic control of trade and industry.

"Knox had a fairly narrow vision of what the American Revolution should accomplish: essentially independence from Britain with a society that would be of the same sort as they had before the Revolution," says Windham native Alan Taylor, a Pulitzer-prize winning historian at the University of California-Davis and author of *Liberty Men and Great Proprietors*. "He wanted to be one of those great men, the governing elite, the natural aristocracy of the new republic. And to do that, he needed lots of land."

Montpelier in Thomaston (above) celebrates the life and times of Henry Knox (below), but the general was also widely vilified in his day.

In search of land, Knox turned his eyes on Maine, where his wife had inherited the kernel of a once-vast estate. Knox was self-made, a Boston-born bookseller who read his way to expertise with artillery and married into one of the most powerful families in New England. His wife, Lucy Flucker, was the granddaughter of Samuel Waldo, an early eighteenth-century merchant and slave trader who owned 575,000 acres of coastal Maine encompassing today's Knox and Waldo counties. Lucy had inherited 20 percent of this vast estate, but another 40 percent was owned by Massachusetts, which had confiscated it from heirs who had remained loyal to Britain. Most people assumed the confiscated land would be distributed to rank-and-file Revolutionary War veterans in lieu of their unpaid wages, just as loyalist estates in Vermont had.

TOP RIGHT: DIDIER DORVAL/MASTERFILE; BOTTOM LEFT: STAPLETON COLLECTION/CORBIS

Knox had other plans.

The three-hundred-pound general used his contacts to ensure all the confiscated lands were to be transferred to a single war veteran: himself. To do this, he got himself appointed as the government agent responsible for disposing of the property, then auctioned it to a silent partner for three thousand dollars, a ninth of its market value. Sixteen months later — in 1792 — the partner passed it on to Knox for the same bargain basement price. The following year he purchased the remaining 40 percent of the Waldo lands from Lucy's siblings for $25,000. By this time he'd also acquired another three and a half million acres, including most of what is now Washington, eastern Hancock, and northern Somerset counties. At their apogee, Knox's land holdings in Maine were larger than the state of Connecticut.

"He took advantage of his inside position in a way that certainly wouldn't look good today and was controversial at the time, especially among those people who were already living on these lands," says Taylor.

In Thomaston, fellow land baron Robert Hallowell Gardiner remarked, Knox set himself up "in the style of an English nobleman." The original Montpelier, constructed in 1794, was said to be "a much larger house in every respect than any other private house from Philadelphia to Passamaquoddy." Located near the banks of the St. George River, CONTINUED ON PAGE 120